

Report on Twelfth Annual Forum of UTS Graduates in the UK

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On Saturday July 4th, a group of 23 UTS graduates and friends met in the Derbyshire Peak District. This was a record number of attendees for the forum, with participants from the Continent as well as from different parts of the UK. The forum has evolved over the years from being just a meeting of UTS graduates to a more academic forum open to anyone with an interest in academic discussion of critical issues around Unificationism.

A sprinkling of the younger generation were present this year, including Matthew Huish, the new national leader-elect of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, UK, who has also been working with the organising committee. This is very encouraging as it is important that a tradition of critical engagement, both with Unificationist teachings as well as with the movement's role in the broader society, continues into the next generation. This year's theme was "Plurality and Dissent in Unificationism". The theme brought into focus a number of issues with which the membership is concerned at this time, as well as setting the present travails of the Church within an historical perspective.

One is always surprised on these occasions by figures at the heart of the Unification establishment who harbour radical leanings and sceptics who outdo each other in the race towards orthodoxy. But this is the fascination of a movement/religion in the maelstrom of self-realisation, transition and exploration. This is a great occasion for the sharing of ideas, challenging our ability to present ideas persuasively as well as stirring us from our 'dogmatic slumbers'. Despite the divergence of opinions, and the occasional furrowed brow, exchanges have been invariably good-natured with plenty of shared humour. And it was so on this occasion also.

The two presentations that stood out for me – though for very different reasons – were those of David Hanna and Stephen Stacey. David spoke from personal experience of the pain that the splits in the Unification movement have caused, dividing friendships, families and longstanding relationships of trust, and spoke with tempered regret of the denunciations and demonization of individuals carried out by some of the factions. He related in this context the words of Gamaliel in Acts 5:38-39: "Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God".

Steve's talk brought out very starkly (for me at least) some of the dangers in attempting to speak from an absolute moral perspective (in this case heterosexual marriage as normative, although the observation is

widely applicable): one frequently ends up asking leading questions, purveying as facts assertions that are questionable, or pursuing – in the cause of a greater morality – scientific and moral views that have been wholly discredited (here something akin to eugenics).

"Plurality and Dissent in Unificationism"

Within this broad theme the organizing committee identified a number of possible topics:

- Perspectives on historical schisms in religions
- Disunity or apparent disunity within the founder's family
- Free will, spirituality, conscience and social freedom
- Facing up to plurality and dissent in Unificationism
- Freedom under religious law in Cheon Il Guk

The schedule of speakers and titles was as follows (Peter Stephenson was also scheduled to present a paper but was unable to attend).

Dr. David Hanna *Truth is the first casualty of war*

Dr. Colin Turfus *Neo-Iconoclasm*

Chris Le Bas *Are the concepts of absoluteness and plurality incompatible? Models arising from reflections on religion and science*

Dr. Don Trubshaw *The Billion Ways of God: Universalist Unificationism in a Post-Montheist Age*

Stephen Stacey *Freedom within the Principle: The fallacy of giving same-sex companionate relationships the same legal recognition as heterosexual unions*

Graham Simon *Change without bloodshed – the Glorious Revolution*

William Haines *Deconstructing church doctrine on discipline*